

Spiders: learning to love them

by Lynne Kelly

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Spiders are a fascinating, yet often misunderstood group. They are feared by many, and often for completely unjust reasons. In *Spiders: learning to love them*, Lynne Kelly attempts to address the misunderstandings surrounding spiders, and introduce the reader to the amazing world of spiders. She does this quite successfully.

Beginning with a discussion of why we fear spiders, the book then covers the diversity of spiders, followed by a detailed, yet highly readable overview of spider biology and ecology. Finally, a chapter titled 'Changing the image' wraps up the book with a discussion of the public perception of spiders. This structure does bear some superficial resemblances to Paul Hillyard's *The Book of the Spider*, yet Kelly's writing style and anecdotal approach clearly separate the two. Appendices following the main text are particularly informative, including guides to discovering and recording spiders in your own backyard, identifying different types of spider webs, and a table relating common names to spider families. Of particular use is a concise glossary, covering terms that may be less familiar to the reader.

Spiders: learning to love them could be used solely as an introductory book on spiders. However, such books already exist, for example Main (1976) and Simon-Brunet (1994). The real strength of this book lies in Kelly's anecdotal approach. She charts her journey from extreme arachnophobe through to (possibly obsessed) spider-lover. These personal accounts add an element not found in other spider books, particularly good for those who are not keen on spiders. By taking this journey step-by-step, readers uncomfortable around spiders can be slowly introduced to the world of spiders, while simultaneously reading about the author's own experiences. That said, for a true arachnophobe, the sheer number of pictures early on (including the front cover) will probably prove too much of a deterrent.

Criticisms are few and far between. Despite one minor inaccuracy in the glossary, compar-



ing haemolymph to haemoglobin, the book appears to be technically correct. The only other negative comment is that if this book is to be used as an 'authoritative book on spiders', as suggested in promotional material, there are other books available that cover spider identification and biology in more detail. These include Clyne (1969), Main (1976) and Simon-Brunet (1994).

For any amateur spider-enthusiast, *Spiders: learning to love them* will provide interesting reading. For anyone who is uncomfortable around spiders, this book is essential reading. The same applies for arachnophobes, although some work may be required before tackling the images presented. Finally, for those who know all there is to know about spiders, this book presents a very interesting personal tale about learning to love spiders. In summary, *Spiders: learning to love them* contains something for everyone, and is written in a style that is not only easy to read, but enjoyable as well.

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References

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